SPECIFICATION

Please enter the following amendments:

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0096] Additionally, network elements 802-808 can interpret the additional DCC bytes within a SONET signal. Network elements 810-814 cannot interpret the additional DCC bytes within a SONET signal, while network elements 816-820 can interpret the additional DCC bytes within a SONET signal. Accordingly, network elements within ring 830 and ring 834 can interpret the additional DCC bytes, while a number of network elements within ring 832 cannot. Therefore, a given network element can communicate with different network elements employing different number of DCC bytes for communication. For example, when network element 804 communicates with network elements 802 or 806, the additional DCC bytes can be employed for management communication. However, when network element 804 communicates OAM&P information to network elements [[210]] 810 and [[214]] 814 within ring [[232]] 832, the standard DCC bytes are employed.